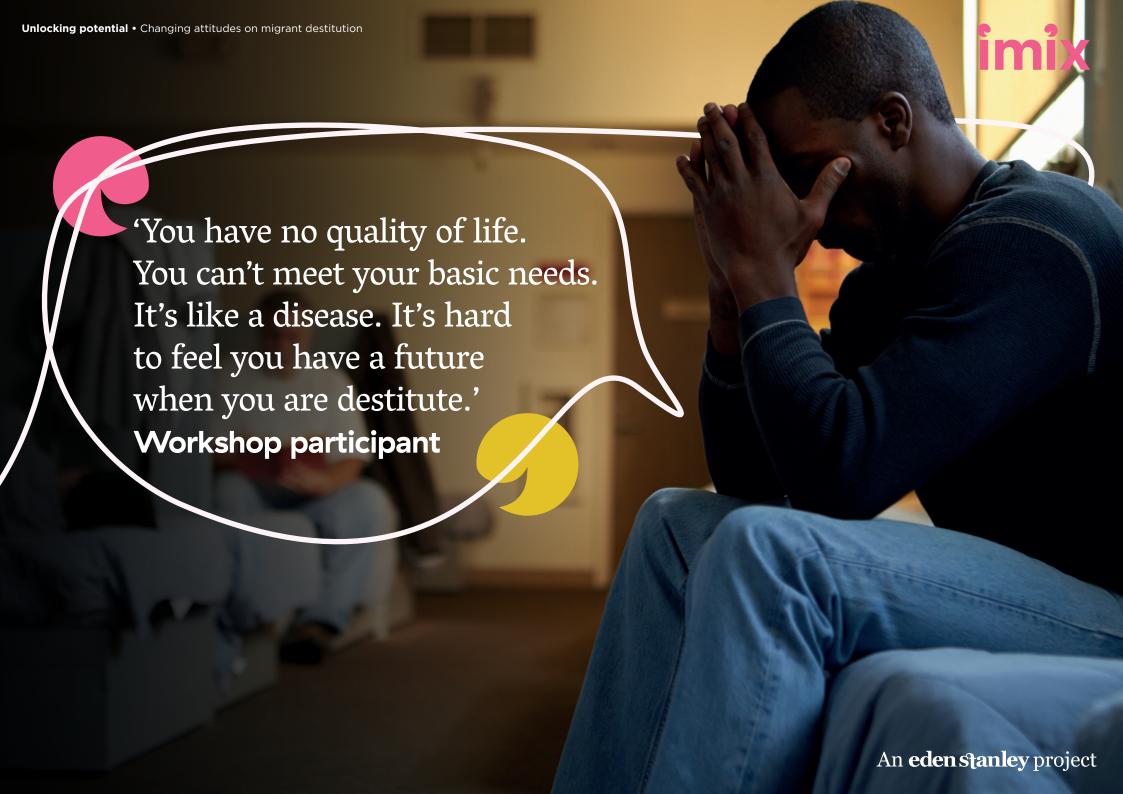




Un	lock	ing
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Changing attitudes on migrant destitution

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## Introduction

Community leaders talk about building thriving towns and cities, where **everyone is welcome**. Where all of us participate and no one is left on the margins.

But we can't claim we're creating thriving communities when people are destitute. We can't say we welcome everyone when people trying to build a new life in the UK can't access the basics – like food to eat or a place to stay.

Like the families who have fled here from Ukraine in search of safety, but find themselves homeless. The key workers who have lived here for decades, paying taxes and raising families, but when hit with tough times, can't access welfare support. The refugees who have been told they can stay, but are then left in limbo.

Within every community, our lives are connected. When we all have the same opportunity to participate in community life, it gives a boost to everyone around us too: neighbours, local families, schools, community groups, and businesses.

We can't build thriving communities if we don't do something about migrant destitution.

We mustn't give up on the problem just because it's not a priority in Westminster right now.

There is still a lot that we can do.

We can extend a hand to people facing destitution, including those barred by the UK's immigration system from the support available to everyone else.

People who are destitute because of migration policy have lost their place in community life. We can provide them with a route back, and unlock the potential in our communities.





## **About this toolkit**

This narrative toolkit is for everyone who wants to **communicate about migrant destitution**, to change practice and policies so that fewer people end up cut off from their communities.

#### We've designed it for:

- Frontline charities and community organisations who support refugees and migrants
- Local and regional authorities and devolved national governments, especially elected representatives and officials responsible for community integration, homelessness, social services and education
- National refugee, migrant and asylum sector organisations
- Charity allies whose work focuses on adults and children in or at risk of destitution

It provides all the elements of a strategic narrative: a messaging framework, suggested copy, and advice on how to engage particular audiences on this topic. Our research shows that the narrative approach outlined here can motivate those best placed to challenge migrant destitution, and mitigate the harmful effects of our immigration system.

This toolkit is the result of a project that included people with lived experience of destitution related to the migration system (we've included their own words in this report); and representatives of many different organisations,

from advocacy organisations to local authorities. You can read more about the project method in the appendix.

The toolkit is in two parts:

#### Part 1

Outlines the rationale for our narrative approach, and the components of a successful narrative on migrant destitution.

#### Part 2

Is a set of tools for you to draw on when planning your own communications on this topic.



## **About migrant destitution**

When you're destitute, you don't have enough money to pay for accommodation, or for **the essentials anyone needs to live**, like food, heating, lighting, or basic toiletries.

People who are destitute face serious risks to life and health and are vulnerable to exploitation and violence. In 2019, it was estimated that 2.4 million people are destitute, including 550,000 children¹.

Some groups of foreign nationals in the UK are at particular risk of becoming destitute. Their immigration status may mean they can't work, or they have no access to the social safety net that is usually there to stop people falling into extreme poverty or destitution.

Around 1.4 million people are ineligible for UK benefits and housing support, even some who have worked and paid taxes for many years. This is known as 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF).

Even when support is available, establishing need and eligibility can be hard, because people here as migrants are generally subject to more legal processes.

Tougher immigration measures and the cost-of-living crisis mean the next few years will see even more people cut off from state support because of their immigration status. This will lead to more people becoming destitute.





## Unlocking potential: a story to be shared

Our migrant destitution narrative boils down to this: a story we need to keep sharing about communities where everyone participates, and no one's potential is wasted.

Name it – the town, city, region or country your audiences care about  Let's shake their confidence in how	Working together to unlock potential  Our community is supposed to be a place where everyone is welcome and no one is left on the margins.	Most community leaders share this vision. Inclusion is a big theme from our audience research.
far they're really meeting their community commitments	But we can't say we welcome everyone when people who	
We're not 'othering' people using labels like 'migrants' or 'refugees' – just talking about people who have	have come here to build a life can't access the basics: food to eat or a place to stay.	Spelling out the reality of destitution
come here to build a life  Naming the issue	We can only build a thriving, inclusive community if we do something about migrant destitution.	Here's some reassurance: an inclusive community is possible. But it needs our audiences to act.
	We can extend a hand to people facing destitution, including those barred by their immigration status from the support available to everyone else.  We can offer them a way back into community life,	We need them to recognise their hands aren't tied by immigration policy. There is something they can do. This is a good place to add your specific call to action.
Using 'we' shows we're on the same side of our audiences – we share their goals and challenges, and can help	and unlock the full potential in our communities.	This calls back to the opening idea of inclusive communities where everyone participates
		An <b>eden stanley</b> proje





## Why this narrative?





We've created a single narrative about migrant destitution that can be used to build understanding and drive change among particular target audiences.



When all our communications, messages and stories support the same overall narrative, we have the **best chance of cutting through** and driving change.



Our target audiences are the people whose role it is to enact policy, and influence how existing powers are used. We've focused on those at local and regional government level, and within national governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. While these bodies don't decide migration policy, they have considerable statutory and discretionary powers to help individuals facing destitution.



Stakeholders in these organisations have the power to protect people from the worst effects of UK Government migration policy. They can encourage longer-term local solutions, in partnership with third sector organisations and community groups. We need to encourage more of them to recognise it's an issue in their communities, and get resourceful to tackle it.



So many communities have stepped up to support Ukrainians displaced by war. This includes towns and cities with no previous track record of supporting asylum seekers and refugees. This is a significant moment, which we can seize by uniting around a single narrative.





We've made a deliberate choice to **focus on encouraging local action**, rather than develop a narrative that calls for outright national policy change.

The UK Government continues to position as tough on immigration, limiting the scope right now for any UK-wide policy change that could be perceived as making migrants' lives easier.

Our narrative has been developed with this in mind, which is why it's targeted at local and regional governments and national governments in the devolved nations.

By focusing here, we:



#### Meet an audience need

Our research found an appetite among some local authorities and charities, for politically-neutral resources that encourage public bodies to use their statutory and discretionary powers.



#### **Broaden reach**

Talking about local solutions, and not about a radical overhaul of the UK migration system, is more likely to engage centrist, mainstream policy audiences, where current rights-based narratives are less successful.



#### Play a long game

A positive, asset-based approach can lay the foundations for future UK policy change (for example, following a general election), without cutting across shorter-term single-issue campaigns.

Of course, the influencing eco-system includes other routes to drive change, all vital to ending migrant destitution.



#### **Legal routes**

Some activists are using legal routes to force the Government into policy U-turns, such as the European Court of Human Rights' intervention that grounded the first planned deportation flight to Rwanda in 2022.



#### **Antagonistic campaigns**

These highlight the injustice of Government policies that leave people destitute, and how such policies deny people their rights. The sector has a role and a duty to express outrage at a grossly unfair and hostile system, and mobilise its base in support of change.



#### Insider influencing

Organisations like RAMP Project are building relationships and support in Westminster and Whitehall, finding ways to influence and shape future Government policy. Some charities prefer to raise immigration in their public affairs work, rather than in their public engagement.



Our narrative can help support these other parts of the influencing eco-system, particularly campaigns that try to secure limited policy change, such as lifting NRPF conditions in specific circumstances.



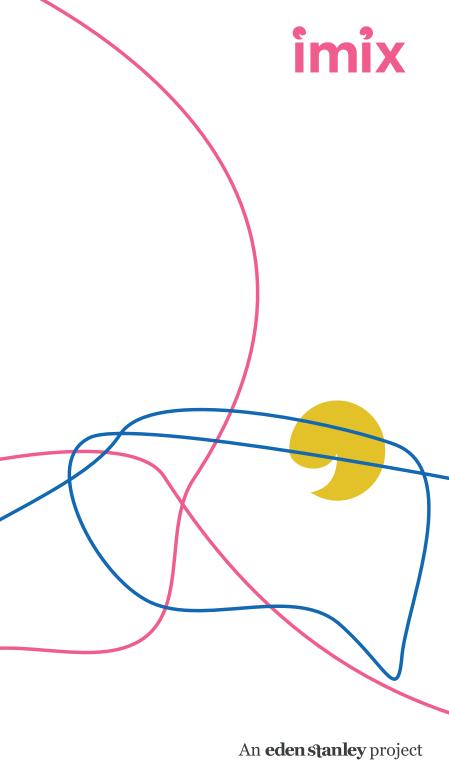
## Finding the common ground

We **can't assume** our audiences think about issues like migrant destitution in the same way we do.

Those who work in local and regional government bodies, either as elected representatives or as paid staff, are a mixed group. They include people on the political right and left. Among elected representatives, party political affiliation plays a big part in how they approach their roles. Meanwhile, officials have to demonstrate political neutrality at all times.

Through our research, we've looked for ways of framing this issue that are most likely to capture attention and motivate these audiences, regardless of political affiliation.

Two frames are particularly important: participation and decentralisation.







#### **Participation**

Leaders at local, regional and devolved national government levels often talk about the importance of inclusive communities, where everyone who lives and works there can participate and benefit.

Our narrative focuses on providing people facing destitution with a way back in to community life, and helping create thriving communities where everyone participates. This kind of mutual reciprocity includes contributing economically, but also other forms of community participation.

We can show our audiences that destitution is the antithesis of participation:

Participation	Destitution	
Visible	Hidden	
Safe and stable	Dangerous	
Inclusive and integrating	Isolating	
Beneficial to communities and individuals	Harmful to communities and individuals	
Includes economic benefits	Ultimately costs the public purse	
Leads to inclusive communities based on mutual reciprocity	Leads to communities where people are shut out, surviving on 'handouts'	



#### **Decentralisation**

Our audiences take a strong interest in decentralised decision-making.

This trend encompasses a range of initiatives, from devolved powers to national governments outside Westminster, to localism initiatives in all parts of the UK. Contrasting local powers and roles on the one hand with UK-wide centralised policy frameworks on the other can appeal to audiences across the political spectrum.

We can remind our audiences of the power they have to mitigate the worst effects of the UK migration system on individuals in their communities. And that they can – and should – exercise this power, whatever their views on the system that's been imposed on them.





# Five principles for communicating about migrant destitution



01

Describe **participation** in all its forms

02

Highlight the **human cost** 

03

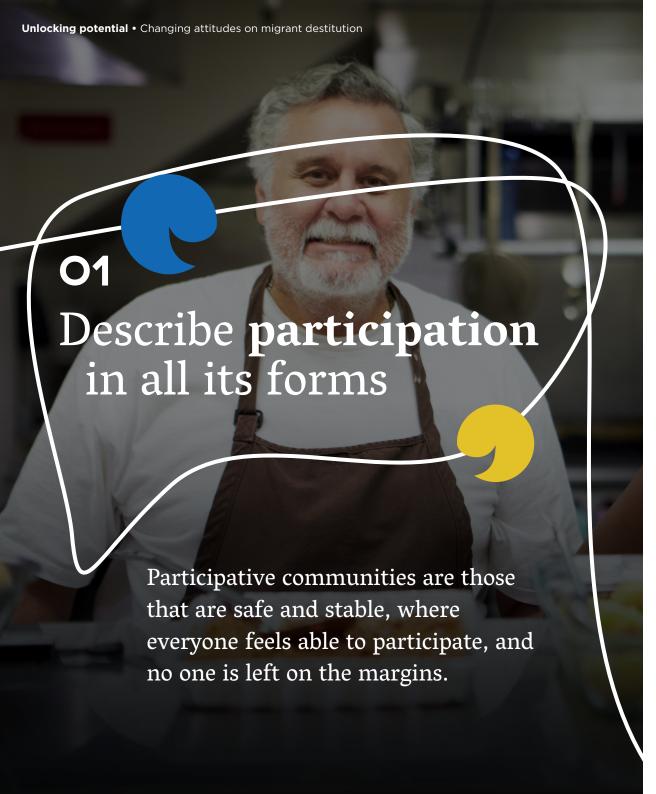
Show we're on the **same side** 

04

Encourage **resourcefulness** 

04

Reflect **reality** 





That participation might be through work, but there's so much more to it than that. It's about volunteering, caring for others, education, cultural exchange and simple neighbourliness.

When we focus on forms of contribution like working and paying taxes, we reduce someone's value to their economic worth. We end up talking about the 'exceptional' cases, like highly-qualified doctors, and by implication, put a lower value on those less able to contribute economically, like children and older people.

When we talk about participation, we can talk about all the ways that people engage in mutual reciprocity and how this benefits communities.

And we can contrast it with destitution – a state that isolates people, wastes human potential and ultimately costs the public purse. Destitution means children can't grow and develop their talents. People who could fill jobs in a labour shortage are stopped from working. Families have to rely on whatever 'handouts' they can get from charities and public bodies.

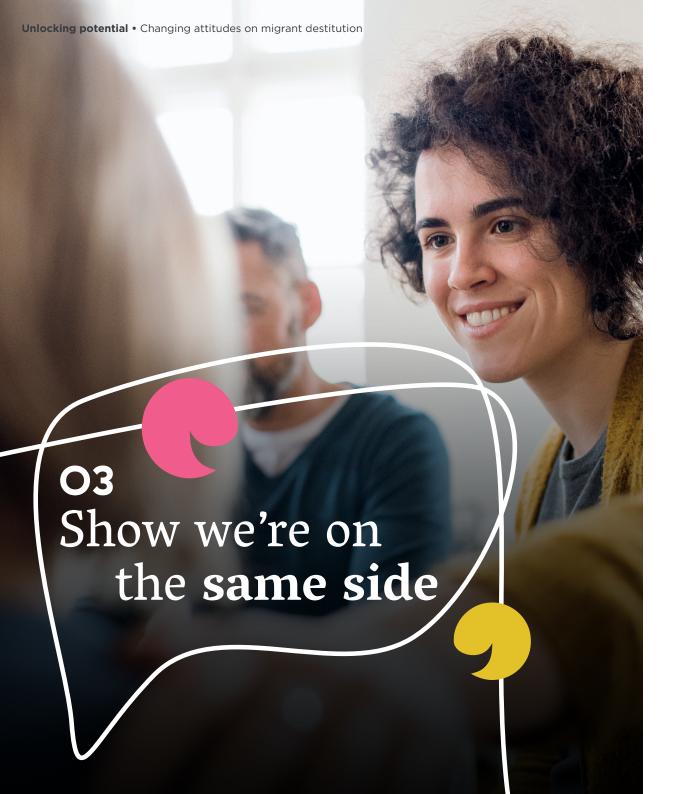




'Destitute' is a word that's generally understood by these audiences, but it doesn't follow that they really know what it means. So let's talk about (and give a voice to) people who can't access the basics we all expect: food to eat or a safe place to stay. Or those that have somewhere to live but can't afford toiletries or heat, or have to share their home with an abuser. Or the children who can't get to school, or to play with friends. Include specifics, so it feels real.

As well as showing the physical constraints, show the emotional impact too: how destitution leaves people feeling. Isolated from their communities, even when they've lived here for years. Struggling to feel safe. Even to feel fully human.

The best way to bring home the human reality of destitution is through foregrounding the voices and stories of people who have experienced it.



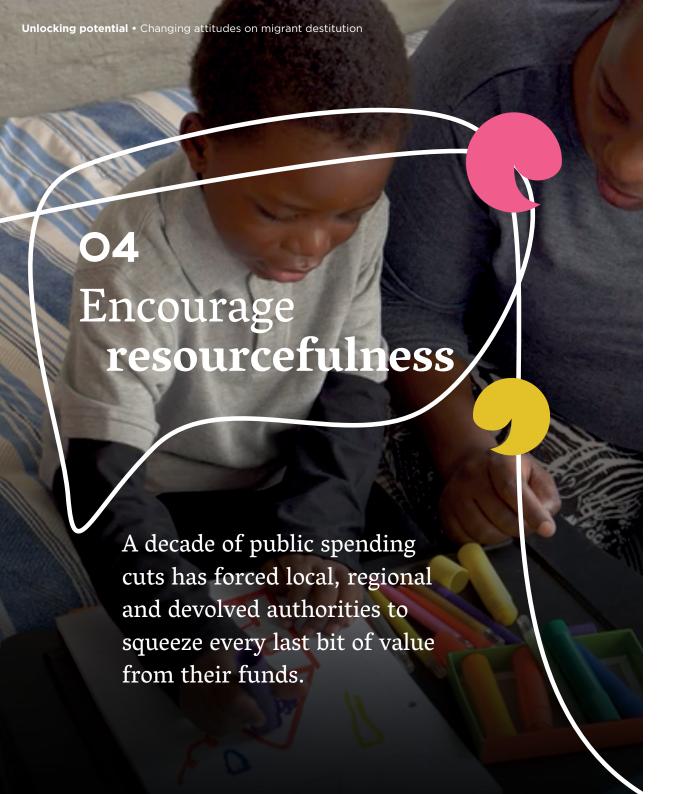


## Within every community, our lives are connected.

So when we talk about the benefits when everyone participates, these are benefits that we all get to enjoy. On the flipside, when some of us are destitute, we can't claim to have built a safe, inclusive or welcoming community.

The duty to protect people and provide a way back in to community life is a collective one. We're not expecting our audiences to do this alone, and we're on their side. Many of the actions that local authorities and devolved governments are taking to address migrant destitution have sprung from collaborative working with sector and community organisations.

By not letting ourselves be cast as antagonists, we keep the conversation in a politically-neutral space. This makes it easier to engage audiences from across the political spectrum.

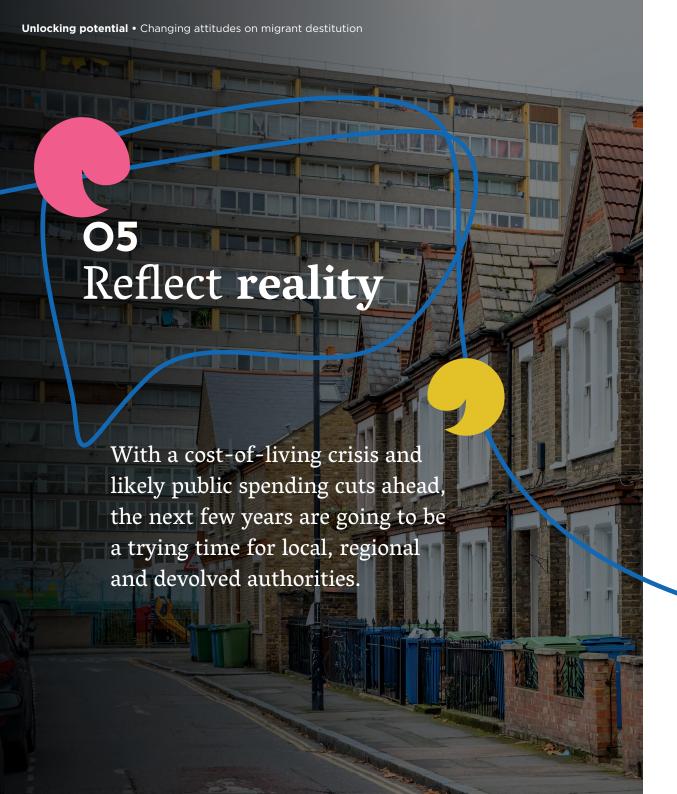




We're now asking them to bring this resourcefulness to bear on addressing migrant destitution. Acknowledging what they do already to deliver more with less can help them feel 'seen', and more likely to engage.

We can remind these audiences that they have power and can use it to mitigate the impacts of centralised policy on their local communities. Evoking the decentralisation agenda is a useful frame here. We need to include specific calls to action – with a focus on preventative action that stops people becoming destitute in the first place.

Supporting people in crisis (including destitution) costs the public purse far more in the long term than preventing people reaching that crisis point in the first place. We should show our audiences that taking a proactive approach creates savings that can be invested in other areas of community life.





More people are going to be in need of support, and there will be even fewer resources to go around.

We can only unlock action on migrant destitution if we show our target audiences that tackling this issue helps them meet their goals and commitments – whether that's a safer and more welcoming community, or helping families in poverty. For representatives who will face an electorate at some point, making this connection is particularly resonant.

We've provided some examples of shared goals here, but do your own research into your specific target audiences. What else is on their agenda that action on migrant destitution can help them with?



## **Our toolkit includes:**

#### Messaging framework

A set of evidence-based key messages to draw on, so that we're consistent and clear

#### **Supporting people**

How to provide a platform for people to share their own experiences of migrant destitution

#### In a nutshell

The messaging compressed into a few words, to copy and paste into your communications

#### Planning your own

A guide to planning your own communications, from audience to call to action

#### Do's and don'ts

Summary guidance on how to communicate with stakeholders on this topic

#### **Resources checklist**

Links to resources and reading to help you get going



## The messaging framework

The messaging framework is a **set of key messages that we can draw on in our communications, so that we're consistent and clear**. An effective, persuasive argument should draw on all four elements of this framework.



#### The problem statement

What is the issue we want to address? Don't assume people already know.



#### **Case for support**

Why should we act? People need to know why taking action on this issue helps them achieve their goals, and to believe it's likely to make a difference



#### Call to action

What do we want our audiences to do? Be as specific as you can. The content in this framework has to be broad – but spell out a call to action that is clear and relevant.



#### Our role

Who we are and why we're involved. We should establish our credibility to speak and act on this topic.

You can use the content in the framework directly, or find your own words.





# The problem statement What is the issue we want to address?

#### Message

#### No place for migrant destitution

We can't claim we're creating thriving communities when people are destitute. We can't say we welcome everyone when some people trying to build a life in the UK can't access the basics: like food to eat or a place to stay. We don't have to ignore migrant destitution just because it's not a priority in Westminster right now. If we do, we leave people further isolated from communities, even those who have lived here for years. They struggle to feel safe. To feel fully human.

#### **Proof points**

- In 2019, 2.4 million people had experienced destitution in the UK, and one in four of these were non-UK nationals (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2019).
- People not born in the UK face disproportionate risks of destitution because their immigration status means they can't access benefits and housing support, even if they've lived and worked here for years.
- If they demonstrate destitution, then they can access help from local authorities, at a cost to the public purse.
- They are far more subject to legal processes, so demonstrating need and eligibility is harder.
- They are also less likely than UK nationals to access 'in kind support' from local charities or food banks.





#### Message

#### **Unlocking potential**

There are things we can do to help our communities. We can extend a hand to people facing destitution, even those barred from the support available to everyone else. We have the ability right now to fulfil our collective duty: to provide people facing destitution with a way back to community life. Within every community, our lives are connected. So when we play our part, we give a boost to everyone, including neighbours, local families, schools, community groups and businesses. We unlock the full potential in our communities.

#### **Proof points**

How communities miss out when people end up destitute because of their immigration status:

- Children are unable to travel to school, take up university places, or are (wrongly) denied free school meals
- People with valuable skills are not allowed to work, so local labour shortages are not addressed
- More people end up rough sleeping as they can't access homelessness support
- Divisions in communities are reinforced, leading to tensions and an increased risk of violence
- Public funds are used supporting people in crisis instead of improving communities
- Targets on alleviating homelessness, child poverty and boosting the local economy are missed





## Call to action

## What do we want our audiences to do?

#### Message

#### Time for local solutions

Local leaders are skilled at making the most of squeezed resources and creating opportunities for their communities. It's time to apply that resourcefulness here. To find ways to spot and support people who are destitute, and give them a way back in to community life. To prevent others becoming destitute in the first place, and use the savings that result to boost other areas of community life. To create communities where everyone can participate and no one is on the margins.

#### **Proof points**

Examples of actions local, regional and devolved authorities could take:

- Ensure people aren't being wrongly denied support they're entitled to, such as free school meals, because they can't claim 'qualifying benefits'
- Provide universal access to advice services, so people can understand what rights and entitlements they do have
- Ensure availability of community support for people facing destitution, like food banks and other welfare support, and signpost non-UK nationals in need – they are often more likely than other groups to miss out on this support

- Provide stable accommodation to homeless people and families regardless of their immigration status, so they can start to rebuild their lives
- Train staff who work in areas like housing, benefits, social services and education inclusion on supporting people who are migrants, and provide more joined-up support
- Expand use of interpreters and specialist advisors, through voluntary sector partnerships
- Involve people with lived experience of migrant destitution in developing policies and services that affect them





#### Message

#### Let's work together

We're a network of local, regional and national organisations and people with experience of destitution, all focused on ending migrant destitution. We can help you and your colleagues identify and support people who need help to find their way back into community life, using the full range of statutory and discretionary powers at your disposal.

We also highlight the human, social and economic costs arising from migrant destitution, and lobby for change, locally and nationally.

#### **Proof points**

This is where you can talk about your own organisation and its work, and how you can help your audience.



## In a nutshell

Sometimes you just need some text you can use to communicate about the issue. Here's the messaging compressed into a few words. Add the name of the community your target audience care most about – whether it's a village, town, city, region or nation.

Our community [name it] is supposed to be a place where everyone is welcome and no one is left on the margins. But we can't say we welcome everyone when people who have come here to build a life can't access the basics: food to eat or a place to stay. We can only build a thriving, inclusive community if we do something about migrant destitution. We can extend a hand to people facing destitution, including those barred by their immigration status from the support available to everyone else. We can offer them a way back into community life, and unlock the full potential in our communities.



### Do's and don'ts

Planning to communicate with your stakeholders on migrant destitution? Start here.

Do...

Use the migrant destitution messaging framework:

it's been developed through research with target audiences, and with the support of people with lived experience.

Describe: highlight the physical and emotional features of destitution, and the consequences for individuals and communities. Use stories and images to help bring this to life, and provide platforms for people to share their own experiences.

Localise: focus on the community, town, city, region or country that your target audiences care most about. Say that migrant destitution is preventing the development of inclusive communities where everyone benefits.

Include a call to action:

be as specific as you can be about what your audiences can do, and how you can help them. Humanise: counter xenophobic or racist narratives by showing that people facing destitution linked to their immigration status have the same value as anyone else. Show their concerns and troubles are those anyone in their situation would have.



## Don't...

Talk only about rights: our research showed that rights-based narratives are less effective compared with narratives that focus on humanising people in destitution, or that highlight the benefits from inclusive communities where everyone can participate.

Evoke sympathy: people with lived experience who contributed to this narrative strongly reject narratives that remove their agency or portray them as passive victims, defined only by their poverty. Aim for deeper empathy, and empower people to share their own stories.

Focus on legalities: the specific legal mechanisms behind people being forced into destitution can feel overly complicated and technical. There's a risk that audiences simply put the problem into the 'too difficult' box, or assume their hands are tied. Focus on the impacts and solutions, rather than the legal mechanisms.

**Use 'othering' language:** for example, when you're talking about individuals disadvantaged by the migration system, call them 'people' not 'migrants'.



## Supporting people to share their lived experience

People with experience of destitution contributed to the development of our narrative about migrant destitution.

They bring compelling stories and unique perspectives that spark a new understanding of the issue based on empathy. These stories and perspectives can't be easily discounted or ignored by those we want to persuade.

If you're providing a platform for people to share their own stories, here are five things to bear in mind.

#### 01

When you're asking people to talk about their experiences publicly, **check very carefully** with them that they fully understand who will get to see it and if they are happy to be named/pictured, or if they would rather stay anonymous.

#### 02

People can often feel like they 'should' share their story as a favour to you to thank them for the support you may have given them, but then they may not be ready to talk about things that bring up trauma for them. Be super clear that they don't have to talk about things that make them feel upset or uncomfortable.

#### 03

**Set clear boundaries** and ask what they DON'T want to discuss, and what they DO feel happy talking about.



#### 04

In order to get the best out of people when you interview them, you need to make them feel **comfortable and create trust.** 

- Choose a quiet space where you won't be interrupted
- Will the interviewee need an interpreter or perhaps a case worker who they trust and feel comfortable with?
- Will you make notes or record the interview on your phone so you can write it up afterwards? If you are recording it just for note taking be very clear about your intentions.
- Share the questions you will be asking them in advance to give them time to prepare.
- Let them know they can stop at any time and they have the right to change their mind.

#### 05

Remember it's still possible to tell a powerful story, even if the subject doesn't want to be named or featured. A strong story should speak for itself.

- Think about creative angles take a
  picture of the person from behind, pull
  focus on the camera so their face is
  blurred and the background is in focus,
  or just take a picture of their hands or
  their shoes.
- Get photos of the relevant project that still illustrates the story.
- Use stock photos from places like Unsplash which express the theme of the story.
- Be clear in the piece that you are using an alternative name as that person did not wish to be identified.

When IMIX talks to people about sharing their stories with the media, we always run through a safeguarding checklist which you can find on our website here:

imix.org.uk/imixs-safeguardingchecklist-for-media-interviews



## Planning your own communications

**Keeping things simple can help achieve maximum impact**. Use the following principles when planning communications, to keep you on the right track.

#### Audience/s

Understanding your audience/s is crucial. You can't show how taking action helps them meet their goals if you don't know what their goals are. Have they committed to welcoming refugees, ending homelessness, addressing labour shortages, or creating an inclusive community? How much do they know about their powers to at? What else is on their agenda?

#### Channel(s)

An event, a press release to local media, social media content, photo exhibition, or a briefing meeting? Choosing your channel depends on your audience and objective, and also what opportunities are available for you to get in front of stakeholders. Budget is a consideration too.

#### Messaging

Look at the migrant destitution messaging framework, and work out which key takeouts from the narrative you most want your audiences to remember. Understanding this will help you highlight them across your content. As a general rule, we need to see a message many times before it sinks in. So stick with the same messaging each time you communicate on this topic.

#### Content

This is the 'stuff' of your communication – the bit that people will see or read.

Think about what story you want to tell, and focus on the putting the voices of lived experience at the front and centre of your communications. You want people to connect with these stories at a human level, so they're open to what you want them to do.

#### Call to action

If you want your communication to evoke change, you must be explicit about what you want your audience to do next. Then, make sure your content includes this.



## Resources checklist

Looking for more information and advice on how to communicate about migrant destitution, or just want to see what other sector organisations are doing? Start here:





#### **Media tips**

### Safeguarding checklist for media interviews

imix.org.uk/imixs-safeguarding-checklist-for-media-interviews

- A guide to taking anonymous photos with creative impact imix.org.uk/tips-taking-anonymous-photos
- How to create strong news stories imix.org.uk/creating-strong-news-stories
- Working effectively with journalists imix.org.uk/how-you-can-work-effectively-with-journalists

#### **Further reading**





## **Appendix: project method**

The project to create this narrative was run by IMIX, with support from Eden Stanley, the audience-centred communications agency.

The development of the narrative included:

- Three workshops with people with lived experience and partner organisations between August 2021 and April 2022 (two facilitated by IMIX, one by Eden Stanley)
- External factors analysis, based on a limited policy scan and stakeholder interviews, undertaken during February 2022.
- **Research interviews** with 13 stakeholders, representing local government, voluntary sector and media. Three were non-UK nationals and one had lived experience of destitution. Fieldwork took place during July 2022.

## **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to everyone who contributed to this project. In particular, we would like to thank colleagues at NACCOM and Praxis, who have been highly involved throughout.

In addition, our thanks to:

- Asylum Matters
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- The Children's Society
- East European Resource Centre
- Equal Education Chances
- Glassdoor
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- NACCOM
- Praxis

- Project 17
- RAMP Project
- Refugee Action
- Refugee Council
- Refugee Rights Europe
- Shelter
- Unity Project
- Women Seeking Asylum Together
- Women for Refugee Women



Finally, special thanks to the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for funding this important work through their Shared Ground Fund.



## imix

IMIX is changing the conversation about migration and refugees, challenging an often hostile media agenda and altering public perception. We work with partners across the refugee and migration sector to put the case for an open and welcoming Britain.

IMIX facilitates and coordinates communication on migrant, refugee and integration issues. We work closely with partner organisations to support them to achieve their aims by offering mentoring, training and consultancy to meet their specific needs – and to help them reach as wide an audience as possible. Our communications expertise is offered free to organisations of all sizes working on migration, refugee protection and integration in the UK.

#### To find out more:

Visit our website www.imix.org.uk Email media@imix.org.uk Twitter @imix\_uk Instagram @human\_journeys

Join the campaign: togetherwithrefugees.org.uk

Charity number 1183693